CHAPTER III

THE REVIVAL OF LEARNING

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the point of view of intellectual history, the modern world began with the Renaissance, that re-discovery of the treasures of antiquity which deeply stirred the man of the Middle Ages and brought about a "new birth ". The old conception, that this reawakening began with the rediscovery of Greek literature in the fifteenth century, is misleading. Well before that period, the classical heritage had begun to be available to western Europe—not, indeed, in the Greek originals (for few men could read or understand Greek), but in Latin versions. The texts in question were barbarous, inelegant, often inaccurate. But the conceptions of the originals were conveyed faithfully enough, and the result was sufficient to open up new horizons before the wondering eyes of students. It was of this revival—the "Latin" Renaissance—that Dante, Chaucer and Petrarch were born.

The part played by the Jews in this process was of the utmost importance. It may be said, indeed, that it could not have come about as it did but for their agency: and that without them, the revival of the fifteenth century would inevitably have been retarded or assumed a different form. The story is familiar how, in the Dark Ages and after, when the Hellenic tradition was entirely lost to Christian Europe, it was nurtured and yet further

developed in Moslem Spain. It was here that the wisdom